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Safe from Satan's Sting

Obedience to the commandments forges a protective breastplate of righteousness.

By Barbara A. Lewis

The box jellyfish glides through the ocean water with a dancer's gentle grace. Pale blue and almost transparent, it could slip by a swimmer unnoticed.

However, the box jellyfish, despite its alluring beauty, is one of the most venomous marine animals in the world. At the slightest touch, thousands of stinging cells on its long tentacles can paralyze its prey and cause heart failure.

So how do people stay safe from these dangerous creatures? It is easy to avoid them by heeding the warnings and staying out of the waters where the box jellyfish swims.

Commandments Keep Us Safe

Paul understood that there are many dangerous waters in the world where Satan, like the infamous box jellyfish, attempts to sting us with his fiery darts (see Ephesians 6:16). For protection, Paul invites us to put on the armor of God, which includes “the breastplate of righteousness” (Ephesians 6:14). The meaning is clear: if we choose righteousness—if we're obedient to the Lord's voice and to His prophets and leaders—we will be protected from Satan's influence and the choices that would rob us of our happiness.

Consider the many laws and rules that guide and protect

us in daily life. Traffic signs protect us from accidents. Laws of good health protect us from disease. Laws against fraud protect our finances.

Heavenly Father's laws are no different. He operates in a universe of order governed by laws. When we submit our will to His laws, we are protected from the painful consequences of disobedience.

This is not to say that misfortune can't befall those who obey. All of us have trials and experience tragedy. But those who obey are protected spiritually and qualify for the Lord's help, peace, and strength amid such difficulties.

Nephi is a good example. His trek from Jerusalem to the promised land was fraught with hardship, pain, and near-death experiences. He was chased, beaten, and tied to the mast of the ship he had painstakingly built.

And yet the Lord—because of Nephi's faith and obedience—gave him the courage and confidence to “go and do” seemingly impossible tasks (1 Nephi 3:7), as well as the strength to break the cords that bound Nephi's hands and feet (see 1 Nephi 7:17–18).

That same obedience protected Nephi from the sorrow, regret, and literal shocking that Laman and Lemuel endured because of their disobedience.



There are many dangerous waters in the world where Satan, like the box jellyfish, attempts to sting us.

The Consequences of Disobedience

Sometimes people think that commandments interfere with their freedom, when in fact the opposite is true. When we disobey, we must suffer the consequences, which often restrict our freedom. Alcohol and illegal drugs, for example, impair our judgment and can lead to debilitating addiction. Breaking civil laws can result in incarceration. Other sins might deny us of temple attendance. It's no wonder that the scriptures describe Satan's tactics as chains or strong cords that bind us (see 2 Nephi 1:23; 26:22).

Righteousness, on the other hand, brings peace and protects us from those restrictive consequences.

Eight-year-old Thomas S. Monson (1927–2018), later the 16th President of the Church, learned through hard experience that we can't control the consequences of our unwise actions. Thomas and his friend wanted to clear an area in Provo Canyon in Utah so that they could have a gathering place for their friends. To young Thomas, the obvious solution was to burn a circle in the weeds. Thomas knew the rules: "Don't play with matches." He fetched the forbidden matches from the family cabin anyway.

He struck one match and watched with excitement as the dry June grass burst into brilliant orange flames. His elation soon turned to panic when he saw that the flames wouldn't stop at the end of his intended circle. The boys ran for help, and after several hours of effort from a group of men and women, the fire was finally smothered. The cabins were saved.¹

Like young Thomas, we can't always foresee the painful consequences that might result from disobeying the commandments. However, we show our love and trust in the Lord by obeying His greater wisdom.

We Forge Our Own Breastplate

God is eager to shower us with blessings, but we must act to set blessings in motion.

As the scriptures teach us:

"Men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;



"For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves" (Doctrine and Covenants 58:27–28).

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught, "As sons and daughters of God we are *agents* with the inherent capacity to act and to learn—and not *objects* that primarily are acted upon (see 2 Nephi 2:26)."² Our Father gave us a supreme gift. We have the right to choose whether or not to follow His path. With this great freedom comes the responsibility to be accountable for our choices.

A Higher Motivation

Protecting ourselves from Satan's influence is reason enough to don the breastplate of righteousness, but is there a higher motivation to obey?

LOOKING INSIDE: HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY OBEDIENCE?

- Choose a family rule that you have trouble following (such as fulfilling chores). Practice and improve.
- Write down the possible consequences of not following commandments that challenge you.
- Practice being obedient to the Spirit's small voice.
- Ask for a priesthood blessing.
- Develop a habit of daily scripture feasting.
- Make the sacrament a sanctifying experience in your life.



- Do we obey out of fear of punishment? It is probably better to be obedient out of fear than to *not* be obedient. A child might stop hitting his sister for fear of a scolding from his parents. Later, his reason should rise to the higher motive of being kind.
- Do we obey in order to be rewarded? Wanting to be saved and receive blessings are good motivations. However, they still focus on *receiving* rather than *giving*.
- Do we obey because we love God and Jesus Christ and want to serve Them? “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). When we serve and obey willingly out of love and a desire to serve, we more closely approach the example of our Savior. We begin carving our character to be more like His.

LOOKING OUTSIDE: HOW CAN I HELP OTHERS WITH OBEDIENCE?

- Make positive rules in your family or group and be obedient to them. Discuss the possible consequences and benefits of obedience.
- As a family or group, choose to follow one of the Ten Commandments more faithfully, such as “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8).
- Obey God’s laws when you are in groups of friends or associates (in speech and behavior).
- Lovingly defend God’s commandments on social media and in public places.



Strengthening Our Breastplate

Just as rust will weaken metal and leave a breastplate vulnerable to attack, so will sin weaken our breastplate of righteousness and leave us vulnerable to Satan’s influence. To keep our breastplate impenetrable against fiery darts, consider the following:



1. Repent daily. If we mistakenly swim in dangerous waters, we can swim back to safety. Our Father is very forgiving when we repent and try again. President Russell M. Nelson taught, “Nothing is more liberating, more ennobling, or more crucial to our individual progression than is a regular, daily focus on repentance.” He then reminded us:

“The battle with sin is real. The adversary is quadrupling his efforts. . . . He is arming his minions with potent weapons to keep us from partaking of the joy and love of the Lord.

“Repentance is the key to avoiding misery inflicted by traps of the adversary.”³

2. Listen to the Spirit. Elder L. Tom Perry (1922–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles learned this lesson as a child. His grandfather told Tom that horses must always know who is in charge. You train horses to follow commands with a harness and a bit. When you have obedient horses, they only need a tug from the driver to know what to do. The gentle tug—like the still, small voice of the Holy Ghost—guides us, helping our spirit and body to work together to stay on the covenant path.⁴

3. Follow the Savior. Jesus Christ is the greatest example of obedience. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). Amid the agony of Gethsemane, He declared, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). Through this obedience, the Savior finished the work that our Father sent Him to do. If we follow His path and obey even when it’s difficult, we can all return to our heavenly home. ■

NOTES

1. See Thomas S. Monson, “Obedience Brings Blessings,” *Ensign*, May 2013, 89–90.
2. David A. Bednar, *Act in Doctrine* (2012), 38.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” *Ensign*, May 2019, 67, 68.
4. See L. Tom Perry, “Obedience through Our Faithfulness,” *Ensign*, May 2014, 100–101.